

Living with Inflation



It takes new strategies, sometimes even a new lifestyle, to keep up with today's inflation-wracked economy.

Beginning today, Living Section writers take a look at how East Siders are — and aren't — coping with infla-

tion in their day-to-day lives. Today's articles focus on one man's unique, low-cost lifestyle and the dramatic impact inflation has made on elderly residents living on fixed incomes.

Future articles will offer ideas on getting the most for

your money in food, fashion, entertainment, vacations, transportation, and medical services.

Living with Inflation: An ongoing series in The Journal-American starts today in the Living Section.

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High status on a low income

Status is what's in your head, says a European-born engineer who lives well on little money

By LORI VAROSH
Living Section Writer

A television set in the living room saw its heyday in the '50s.

On the wall, a plastic-framed copy of the Mona Lisa smiles at equally inexpensive seascape prints hanging across the room. Most of the green on the green glass chandelier above the desk has worn off, replaced by the fine filaments of a cobweb.

But this is no replica of a Tobacco Road homestead frozen in time. It's a Richards Road homestead, located just south of Bellevue. Its owner, retired engineer Witold Kasper, has other uses for modern days.

In the garage, among piles of plywood sheets, old car batteries and tools, sits a glider some engineers say is more modern than any craft Boeing flies. It too is collecting dust, its wings neatly folded along the streamlined fuselage.

In the general disarray indoors, lie recent copies of Der Spiegel, up-to-date gardening information and stacks of cor-

respondance in several of the 12 languages Kasper speaks.

Let others purchase color televisions and elegant furnishings. Kasper cultivates more practical signs of the good life.

Like the Kasper Giant Cherries — a strain of cherry tomatoes he developed and sells at the greenhouse across the street. Or the cloned rose bushes that line his gravel driveway. Or the 15-item list he compiled of home remedies for common ailments.

Or the theories of aerodynamics he developed and used to build his glider.

WITH BLACK-FRAMED glasses tilted on his nose, Kasper scans the index to his voluminous filing system. Seconds later he pulls out a highly complimentary magazine article from Sport Aviation entitled "The Revolutionary Kasper Wing."

Although he hasn't sold Boeing on its aerodynamic properties, Kasper hasn't lost interest in the glider he designed more than a decade ago. With no backing from major airline companies, he



Witold Kasper spends some of his below-poverty-level-income on books and magazines instead of fancy furnishings.

flight-tested the craft himself. It performed as he predicted, accomplishing documented loops "of impossibly small circumference" and "near-zero speed landings," according to an aviation magazine.

He says he has just figured out how to further increase its efficiency in flight.

Kasper is used to solving problems. As a Boeing engineer for 14 years, he made good money at it.

As a naturalized American of Austrian ancestry, he's had more than a passing acquaintance with the European work ethic.

He says that's why he watches the jaws of inflation close around his adopted country and he

laughs. "I'm living below poverty level and I can't spend half of it," he says, his face cracking into a grin. The smile is overshadowed by thick silver hair and framed with fewer creases than you'd expect from 72 years of living.

THE SLOW GRIN regularly reappears as the widower documents his modest income — \$12 a month from his Boeing pension and \$308 from Social Security.

"Here you have three kinds of money, plastic, checks and cash," he says in his thick Slavic accent. "Everybody sits in debt up to here," he taps his eyebrows.

"It's a materialistic society that's the cause behind the problems you have now."

Things are different in Europe, he says. Every generation went through at least two wars. And in the wars most material things were lost.

"In Europe, status is that which you have in your head. In America, it matters how much you have here," he says, rubbing an imaginary bankroll between his thumb and forefinger.

Kasper was lucky to get out of Europe with his life, never mind material possessions.

An engineer since 1929, he had earned a national reputation as the "father of Romanian sports flying" for his exploits as a champion glider pilot in the 1930s. He took the alias Jan Sikora to work in the Romanian underground during World War II.

In 1947 he was selected by the Polish embassy to help the Russians find one of the few members of the wartime resistance who had escaped — Jan Sikora.

HE WAS GIVEN the authority to have any question answered and to go anywhere. He returned with documented "proof" that

Jan Sikora had been killed by a truck.

"And so I officially buried myself as Jan Sikora and everybody seemed satisfied," he later recalled with a chuckle.

His underground experiences and his work with the Romanian Air Ministry gave him inside information on long-range Soviet plans. In 1949 he learned that the Soviets felt he knew too much. Using his knowledge of the underground and clandestine movements fit for a spy novel, he and his wife escaped to Sweden hours before his arrest was scheduled.

His conviction that Russia plans to begin its major world offensive in 1985 prompted Kasper to build a carefully-engineered bomb shelter behind his Bellevue workshop.

There's not much stored in the concrete cubicle besides more than 20 cans of smoking tobacco, a relic of Kasper's now-cured cigarette habit. But the tax-deductible shelter could be completely outfitted in a week, he says.

Kasper has engineered his entire life with such aplomb, from the time he finished high school at the age of 16. College vacations were spent working on ships so he could travel to India, Spain and other countries.

"MY FATHER told me I was an international bum. And he was right," he chuckles.

The international outlook lingers still. He has had enough brushes with death to consider petty nationalism useless. More important is his hobby and the avocation of his retirement: Research.

If problems threaten his self-sufficiency, Kasper develops a solution.

His primary source of protein is the flocks of chickens that wander at will across his proper-

ty and visit the Christ Church of Bellevue next door. He scoffs at the idea that eating too many eggs may be related to heart trouble.

"When nature created the egg to propagate life, would she have put something detrimental in it?" he asks.

He says he has eaten up to eight eggs a day to prove that a chemical in egg yolk prevents cholesterol from settling in the veins. After a month, he says, his cholesterol level had dropped.

Those assertions are subject to debate. Meanwhile, Kasper lets the chickens scratch out their own meals and puts chicken feathers to use as basting brushes in another economy move.

WHEN TENT caterpillars began invading his fruit trees several years ago, he didn't call in expensive exterminators. He observed the bugs under a magnifying glass, discovered their tiny feet were hooked, but had no suction and figured they could only climb trees, not descend.

He placed tape around the trunks of his trees sticky side up. The bands prevented the creatures from reaching the leaves and in three days the problem was solved.

Kasper also dries his own food, recycles newspapers and turned his thermostat down to 65 degrees long before it was suggested by presidential decree.

He adheres to European home remedies, one of which he claims saved him \$3,500 for a gallstone operation.

He pulls out his doctor's report. It acknowledges the pills Kasper substituted were made up of vitamin E and essence of black radish and grudgingly concludes, "It's hard to argue with success."

Success is well-acquainted with Witold Kasper.



—Staff photos by Michael Good

The retired engineer's primary source of protein is a flock of chickens.